

Work integration of people with disabilities in the regular labour market: what can we do to improve these processes? ¹

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ABSTRACT

Background Given the importance in the current social framework of assuring regular processes of labour market integration for all citizens, this article presents and analyses, as a result of research, the principal elements contributing to the processes of integrating people with disabilities into the regular labour market.

Method The methodological approach of the research follows qualitative parameters. Thematic content analysis techniques, using semi-structured group interviews, were used to identify the principal elements contributing to the processes of integrating people with disabilities into the regular labour market. Thirty two professionals from 17 agencies provided information regarding the role of the family, training, integration monitoring work setting, and personal resources of the worker.

Results The results indicated the *family*, the *training* (prior to and during the integration service), the *monitoring* of the worker in the workplace and the *work setting* were relevant and contributing aspects of this process of work integration.

Conclusions A real and effective commitment on the part of the government is required to regulate and provide resources to create Supported Employment services and allow these services to plan their own interventions, keeping in mind the relevance of and the relationship between aspects like the family, training, monitoring, the work setting and the personal resources of the worker.

KEY WORDS

Work Integration
Supported Employment
Persons with disabilities

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1. Introduction

Supported employment was born in the nineteen eighties in the USA (Wehman 1981, Wehman 1992a, Wehman 1992b), from where it spread to Canada and, progressively, to western countries where the culture of integration is more deeply rooted. Supported employment includes the following processes: offering *training activities* to groups with special difficulties in order to reach work integration, making *searches* in the labour market to identify places of work and *carrying out the placement and monitoring* at the workplace to help people with disabilities to learn all that will help them to develop correctly in their positions. Supported employment uses training strategies for integration with the intervention of professionals in training, experts in the analysis of the workplace and in training at the workplace. In this model, professionals at the supported employment centres offer the help required to both workers with disabilities as well as the work settings which will take them in.

In European countries, supported employment coexists with programmes or "traditional" services of sheltered employment, which offer work to people with disabilities in specific settings. Bellver (2001) and Saloviita (2000) provided data about the introduction of supported employment in Europe during the 1990s. The introduction of this kind of programme and its definitive consolidation is conditioned by, amongst other aspects, the system of relations that is set up between the sheltered sector and the programmes, and by the State's social services policy. Bellver (2001) suggested that in most countries the introduction of supported employment strategies is a difficult process, above all due to the fact that it represents a radical change - from the cultural,

methodological and political point of view - from the traditional model of sheltered employment.

Pallisera et al. (2003a) referred in depth to the evolution of services aimed at facilitating the work integration of people with disabilities in Spain. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that during the 90s, the experiences of supported employment started to slowly emerge as an alternative to the work integration of people with disabilities in the regular market. Verdugo et al. (1998) made an analysis of the progressive introduction of supported employment in the Spanish setting, and a quantitative study of the programmes that existed up until 1988 in Spain, as well as of the users who had benefited from their services. Updated data on programmes, incidences and characteristics of supported employment can be found in Jordán et al. (2003) and Pallisera et al. (2003b).

The number of services related to sheltered employment, regulated at the beginning of the 80s, and number of people who used them, increased in 2000. Although this is a trend that can be observed in most western countries (Visier 2000), in Spain, the growth has been really spectacular, as the progression of the sheltered sector has practically doubled in 10 years. The increase in the number of workplaces in sheltered centres has been to the detriment of fulfilling the aims of supported employment services: to favour dynamics to pass from the sheltered setting to the regular market.

In Spain, supported employment has developed considerably slower than in other European countries, and it still lacks the legal recognition that would give a significant impulse to this modality, setting up clear channels for its funding. At the moment, supported employment is developing from very diverse professional initiatives, with programmes being integrated in the network of social services aimed at people with disabilities.

Although on the whole it can be stated that, in Spain, supported employment is in a clear consolidation process, it is also true that the growth of these services has not been accompanied by studies that allow us to find out which dimensions or factors favour the integration process of people with disabilities in the regular labour market. There are few studies that are centred on the development of integration processes and on obtaining data about the incidence that varying factors may have on the nature of these processes. As we stated in previous articles (Fullana et al. 2003), few studies have been carried out from qualitative methodological points of view that provide us with a global and comprehensive view of the reality and a deep analysis of the diverse elements involved in the process, an analysis which is necessary to be able to propose the guidelines that will enable the work integration processes of people with disabilities in regular settings to be improved qualitatively and quantitatively.

The research panorama on the subject has begun to change recently as several research projects have been carried out to ascertain which factors play a decisive role in the development of integration processes. Here we must highlight the contributions made by Jordán and Verdugo (2003), Alomar (2004), Serra (2004) and Rius (2005).

Our research team has also been working on several studies and their results provide important clues to understand the work integration processes implemented using Supported Employment strategies³.

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- a. Study of the work integration of borderline mentally people with disabilities in the Public Administration of Catalonia (1998-2000). Conveni de col·laboració entre la Universitat de Girona (UdG) - Associació Nabiu (Associació per a la Integració Laboral de les Persones amb Discapacitat Límit a les administracions públiques).
- b. Study of the work itineraries experienced by people with borderline intellectual disabilities who have followed integration processes into Public Administration jobs in Catalonia. Analysis of the impact of work

These studies give us information about the development of work integration processes. The role of the family, the legal framework of the labour setting, as well as training of workers with disabilities, are mentioned as support factors that, amongst others, seem to influence the success of the integration process in a clear way. Based on the results of these studies, the following questions arise which require us to continue looking into the matter: What impact does the labour context have (kind of company, labour legislation of the sector, etc.) on the good progress of the integration process? On which components should the training be focused to have a positive influence on the integrations? What relationship should be established between the family and the integration service to generate the processes that facilitate the continuity of the integrations? Which conditions should monitoring that is carried out in the work setting have to facilitate these processes?

To delve deeper into these issues, we carried out the research presented in this article:

2. A case study of the factors that favour the work integration processes of people with disabilities

integration in the social integration processes of disabled workers (2000-2004) *Conveni de col·laboració Universitat de Girona (UdG)-Associació Nabiu*

- c. Study of the work integration of people with disabilities through Supported Employment in the Girona region (1999-2000) – *Financed by the University of Girona*
- d. The work integration of severely physically disabled persons in the Girona region (2000-2001) – *Financed by the University of Girona*

The aim of this study was to identify and analyse how different factors related with family, work and training, interact and forms particular itineraries of work integration by means of supported employment. This research was carried out in the context of Catalonia (Spain).

Methods

In line with previous studies of our research group, we followed a qualitative approach in order to reach a global comprehension of work integration processes in ordinary settings. In our previous work, job trainers formed a very large group of informants, besides workers, family and personnel directors of companies that hire people with disabilities. The research we present here extended previous work and focused attention on a greater number of professionals from supported employment services in Catalonia, a region in North-East Spain. This methodological approach brings us closer to understanding the development of the experiences of supported employment from a professional position, based on the impressions and the statements of those who have been actively involved in them.

We chose to carry out semi-structured group interviews, with a help guide to contrast the findings of our studies with experiences and opinions of supported employment professionals. In this kind of interview, usually called “focus group”, a great amount of research concerning a particular topic is needed before the interviewer asks the group specific questions related to it. In this context, the group interview can be used for data triangulation besides other strategies (Fontana, Frey, 1998).

Following Fontana and Frey (1998) and de Ruiz Olabúenaga and Ispizua (1989), group interviews were used in our case to contrast and verify, if necessary, the conclusions of

previous studies in order to set out some trend-factors. That is to say, to identify elements that repeatedly appear in integration stories and that clearly influence the process aimed at ensuring successful integration. The interview was structured around 5 main themes: family, prior training of the worker, training by the supported employment, workplace monitoring and the work setting of the person (see Table 1). Questions were asked on each theme and answers enabled us to gain deeper insight into the current problems surrounding these services and find out the opinion of professionals as regards which need to be kept in mind to promote positive work integration processes.

Table 1: Group interview guide

<p>1. FAMILY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of family support • Family expectations • Aspects that must be ensured in the family to contribute to the work integration processes <p>2. TRAINING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The role of compulsive basic training ○ Basic knowledge that facilitates work integration ○ Type of institution: special centre <i>vs</i> ordinary centre and their role in training for adult life and for the development of a working life • Training in the supported employment service itself <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Role of previous training in the integration processes ○ Training aspects to develop to assure the continuity of the integration processes <p>3. INTEGRATION MONITORING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How important is monitoring for the success of the integration? • Monitoring characteristics: temporality and intensity • How to organise accompaniment processes for the good functioning of the integration <p>4. WORK SETTING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current legislation: elements from the current legal framework that favour the continuity of the integrations. Elements that make the integrations difficult. Necessary improvements in the legal framework. • Assessment of the economic advantages or benefits of contracting persons with disabilities. • Attitudes in the work setting.

- Aspects to promote in the work setting to guarantee the continuity of the integration processes.

18 services, all of which were operating between 1995 and 2000, took part in the research project. We would like to remark that the 18 services are highly diverse, both with regard to the specific aspects of their operations, as well as the collectives to which the training and integration actions are aimed. With regard to the characteristics of people served, most agencies provided services to persons with mental retardation, however agencies also provided services to persons with physical disabilities and persons with mental illness. Table 2 shows characteristics of the different services as well as the number of people interviewed in each one.

Interviews were held at the service itself. Each interview lasted for two and a half hours, was recorded, and then transcribed in its entirety. Notes were taken on the context of each service during the interview and borne in mind when the interview was analyzed. These aspects were: disability types, social and cultural characteristics of the recipients, the dominant employment sector in the area and the experience of professionals working with people with disabilities and, more specifically, working with supported employment services.

Data was analysed using thematic content analysis techniques. The guideline was also used as a structure to follow when analysing data. From each interview, we extracted the verbal comments and statements regarding each of the factors considered: family, training, monitoring, work setting and worker's personal resources, noting the coincidences and divergences in the perceptions and points of view of the professionals. This information was used to write a detailed report.

Table 2: Information about the services

SERVICE	PERSONS INTERVIEWS	INITIAL YEAR	CHARACTERISTICS
1	3 (psychologist, teacher and job trainer)	1995	Carries out work integration with people with all types of disabilities. 5 professionals work there.
2	1 (job trainer)	1990	Carries out work integration with people with all types of disabilities. 9 professionals work there.
3	2 (service coordinator and job trainer)	1992	Carries out work integration with people with mental disabilities. 5 professionals work there.
4	1 (coordinator)	1991	Carries out work integration with people with mental disabilities. 4 professionals work there.
5	4 (director and 3 job trainers)	1981	Carries out work integration with people with mental disabilities. 16 professionals work there.
6	3 (coordinator, social worker and psychologist)	1994	Carries out work integration with people with neuromotor disorders. 6 professionals work there.
7	1 (manager)	1997	Carries out work integration especially with people with visual disabilities. 4 professionals work there.
8	1 (psychologist)	1989	Carries out work integration especially with people with disabilities. 6 professionals work there.
9	2 (coordinator and psychologist)	1985	Carries out work integration with people with all types of disabilities. 12 professionals work there.
10	2 (manager and job trainer)	1998	Carries out work integration especially with people with mental disabilities and mental illness. 4 professionals work there.
11	2 (coordinator and job trainer)	1995	Carries out work integration especially with people with mental disabilities. 3 professionals work there.
12	1 (coordinator)	1998	Carries out work integration especially with people with neuromotor disorders. 6 professionals work there.
13	1 (coordinator)	1998	Carries out work integration especially with people with mental illness. 4 professionals work there.
14	2 (coordinator and job trainer)	1995	Carries out work integration especially with people with cerebral palsy and neurological pathologies. 3 professionals work there.
15	2 (psychologist and job trainer)	1998	Carries out work integration especially with people with auditory disorders. 4 professionals work there.
16	1 (teacher)	1989	Carries out work integration especially with people with mental disabilities.

			4 professionals work there.
17	3 (director and 2 job trainers)	1995	Carries out work integration especially with people with mental disabilities. 3 professionals work there.
18	3 (coordinator and 2 job trainers)	1999	Carries out work integration especially with people with mental disabilities and mental illness. 4 professionals work there.

The information the various centres provided us with was not homogenous, and the apparently contradictory statements from two or more centres may have been due to the contextual characteristics of the services: disability types, social and cultural characteristics of the recipients, the dominant employment sector in the area, and the experience of the professionals, as we mentioned above.

At the same time, the greater or lesser emphasis of the professionals on certain factors could be conditioned by the more immediate experiences and by particular situations that concern them at a particular moment. However, this difficulty was minimised by the fact that there is a considerable variation of characteristics from among the 18 participating centres and also because the analysis of this data showed the existence of clear lines of agreement between the professionals of the various services.

Despite the existence of this agreement between the professionals, and aware that the option chosen - a single interview at each service - presents certain methodological limitations, we opted to apply a second complementary strategy that enabled us to compare the conclusions of all this line of research with a greater number of professionals working in the sector. Thus, in June 2003 a seminar in which 60 professionals and the members of the research team participated was organised with the aim of reviewing the conclusions arrived at, qualifying and clarifying them, and adding to them new elements of analysis and guidance for professional practice.

Results

Based on the discussion of the results, each of the analysed dimensions provides guidelines to take into account when planning changes that can positively affect the improvement of the work integration processes carried out based on this methodology.

The family

The family, and not just the worker, becomes the nucleus of attention. This systematic consideration of the family as a health agent requires taking into account the interaction between the family behaviour and the characteristics of the disability, and also how this interaction can exercise a positive or negative influence on the life cycle of the person.

The families must be provided with information about the processes of work integration and about the work possibilities of the disabled person. We must not forget that a lack of knowledge about this could mean that the families do not potentiate to the maximum the possibilities of independence of the person with disabilities, with regard to their social and cultural context.

“Information is essential for all families. That is to say, letting them know about the whole process: what the steps will be, what we expect, what can be done...It is very important that the family is well informed and, above all, the information must be clear”. (Job trainer, Service 1)

“It seems there are limitations to knowing how to explain to parents what having a child with a disability means. They come here from school and there are parents who say: nobody told me my child is disabled”. (Psychologist, Service 8)

Findings suggest there is a need to set up channels of joint co-operation between the family, the service agency, and professionals to offer the necessary support to the families, helping them have realistic expectations about the possibilities of social and

work integration of their daughters and sons. In this sense, the need to work systematically with the families with the aim of co-ordinating objectives and strategies of action is shown, to encourage training actions with parents, etc. In this way, we gradually potentiate the real construction of lines of collaboration between families and professionals with regard to the design, organisation and introduction of alternatives of standardisation at all levels. It was noted that collaborative work dynamics with the families need to be set up as soon as possible. Our research points out that maintaining this dynamic of collaboration between family and professionals is possible if it was initiated at school. We understand how important it is to structure, in a connected and coordinated way, professional actions throughout a person's life, constructing a bridge from school to work with the participation of the people with disabilities and their families. In this way, the families will probably be better prepared to accept the consequences that might result from the work integration experience and will have more strategies to confront any possible incidents that arise during this process.

Training

Interviewed professionals agreed that companies value *social skills* (communication and collaboration at work with other workers), *participative skills* (planning and organisation of tasks in a progressively autonomous way) and *methodological skills* (solving problems at the workplace) more than *technical skills*. Therefore, the training should address the development of knowledge and socio personal skills, training in the specific job tasks, and training regarding motivation and positive attitudes towards labour tasks, etc. To the extent that the young people have worked on these skills in their previous training environments may positively impact work integration.

“Most times those boys and girls who are easy to get on with or are more socially skilled, or they relate and get attached more quickly to the surroundings, find it less difficult to integrate.”
(Coordinator, Service 9)

“Attitudes..., social skills.... are basic. They are the first thing we work on here. We are not so highly concerned with whether they get technical training, whether they learn what they are trained to do, but with the attitudes and skills they need in the world of work.” (Coordinator, Service, 18)

It is also important to add that, although social and personal skills take priority over academic skills, although most of the professionals interviewed also highlighted that *the level of academic training of workers can contribute very positively to work integration processes*, both as regards the possibility of occupying more specific, and normally more qualified, posts, and as regards increasing opportunities to improve and make progress at work.

“It is obvious that the more skills, the better. If they can read and write, if they have good motor, communication, speaking, time and space skills, even better all these areas are also very important because many jobs involve them. All this knowledge of reading and writing, understanding, reflection, are useful, of course, to obtain higher level jobs and, in some cases, to cover the expectations of some workers and their families more satisfactorily.” (Coordinator, Service 9)

Thus, training is necessary for integration, both the training received during the compulsory education period as well as that which is offered in the work integration service. Training during compulsory education should include curriculum concerning academic-labour guidance. Therefore, we should offer the student specific curriculum and experiences concerning the world of work, techniques for looking for work, socio-personal skills linked to work, etc. In addition, individualised guidelines to facilitate the student getting to know his own responsibilities and interests, to guarantee decision making that is, suitable to his psychological, social and personal characteristics, and suitable to the work options offered by the labour market.

The particular characteristics of the organisation of local supported employment programmes, which make them dependent on specific subsidies instead of having stable financing, leads us to consider some guidelines. Therefore, it is also very important that

the training programmes of the services should enjoy a greater margin of flexibility than they have, especially when referring to occupational training courses subsidised by the administration. Only in this way can we guarantee a training that is as individual as possible and really adjusted to the needs and interests of the future worker. In addition, it is basic to favour the suitable pairing of the person to the world of work, and therefore we need to promote programmes that facilitate professionals of the service with as careful an analysis as possible of the skills, abilities, interests and work expectations of the worker, at the same time adjusting as far as possible to the characteristics of the world or work (the general and also the geographically closer one).

In addition, the training of practical work experience before the work integration was confirmed and should be included as one of the main learning components. Practical *in situ* work training activity, as a preparatory step for future hiring and as a key stage for the preparation and progressive adaptation to the workplace by the worker.

“Practical work experience has a dual aim: on the one hand, it gives training and the opportunity to learn in real situations, and on the other, it helps get into companies.” (Psychologist, Service 8)

“We cannot lose sight of the fact that often when a person is given a contract, there is a period of practical work experience beforehand, and this period of work experience is a very important part of training. Thus, apart from the values and factors that help adapt to the workplace, there is this later period of training, of adaptation, in the workplace, which is a period of practical work experience, and that is also, in short, what can make the transition to being given a contract.” (Job Trainer, Service, 10)

The work setting

Supported employment professionals think that, from the public administrations, there should be a much more convincing effort to facilitate hiring people with disabilities in regular settings. Currently, what is placing obstacles in the way of the work integration of people with disabilities is not so much the lack of compliance with the legal regulations (the 1982 LISMI and the so-called "alternative measures" to complement

the 2000 law⁴) but rather the fact that current legislation favours placement into the sheltered employment sector more than into regular work contexts. It should be taken into account, that the existence of economic advantages for companies that hire people with disabilities is an element that favours integrations; however, these advantages are scarce and viewed as significant in the cases of indefinite contracts and full time contracts.

The “alternative measures” have not been well accepted by the sector of professionals in Supported Employment and have been appraised as a step backwards on the path to full social and work integration of people with disabilities.

“.. . We don’t want to force companies to comply with this law (the LISMI) and so, we are seeking ways to get round it. And, instead of enforcing the law, we enable companies to give work to special centres, give subsidies to some foundation or whatever, to solve this problem and, of course, this is basically placing restrictions on compliance with the law.” (Manager, Service 10)

“This (the alternative measures) is a disaster because, firstly, there is no kind of pressure on companies to comply. The only pressure that we have seen is in companies with official subsidies which, given that they have to declare they comply with the 2% quota, sometimes call us and say: “listen, I have to do it!” So it’s all a rush. But if the company is not asking for an official subsidy, nobody goes and tells them: “listen, if you don’t have the 2%, pay up”..... which means that if they didn’t comply with the 2% beforehand, they don’t do the 2% or the alternative measures now. But there’s also something else and it’s that the possibility the company has to make some kind of donation to a foundation or sheltered employment....has generated a certain competition of entities in our sector, to try to occupy..... We can see people coming and going directly to companies to get offers of donations...I don’t think this is very positive and it would have been worth creating a fund, and then, with a wide-ranging participation of the entities in the sector, decide what the money could be spent on”.(Coordinator, Service 6)

Although supported employment services have progressively expanded in Spain during the last decade, the results of these projects contrast with the scarce visibility of the

⁴ The LISMI (Law of Social Integration of the Disabled) establishes the obligation to hire people with disabilities in public and private companies or 50 or more workers. The "alternative measures" are substitutive actions to this obligation to hire by companies, they allow state or private companies to be totally or partially exempt from hiring people with disabilities if they take out a civil or commercial contract with a Special Work Centre or with an autonomous worker with disabilities for the supply of primary material, fittings, machinery, etc, or if they provide donations or financial sponsorship to entities that work to promote work integration of people with disabilities.

services offered. The effectiveness of the work of these services also contrasts with the irregular financing they receive from the government.

It is known that the government gives more grants to sheltered employment for each post created for people with disabilities than to the companies that decide to hire these people. It is a fact that does not favour the work integration of people with disabilities in the ordinary work market. In addition, this situation determines the continuity of these services, and that involves, as demonstrated by studies carried out locally as well as by the current research, both the job instability of its professionals and the precariousness of its operation.

Work accompaniment or monitoring on the worker at the workplace

To achieve an optimum integration of the worker in the company, our results highlight the importance of two professionals in the monitoring process: that of the educator or "job trainer" (professional from the work integration service) and that of the "natural supervisor" or worker who is the reference point in the context of the company, both for the worker and for the association that provides the support and follow-up for the integration.

All the work integration services, even those that do not currently carry out follow-up actions, recognise the importance of monitoring as a fundamental component to facilitate the integration of the worker in the job, the decision to carry out monitoring actions does not have to be conditioned *a priori* by the type of disability of the worker, but by his needs and the characteristics of the job. Along these lines, we cannot establish standard time frames, but rather it is necessary to adapt the methodology of monitoring (both the type of specific actions to carry out and the temporality and the

intensity of the actions) according to the needs of the worker and those of the workplace.

"The presence of Job Trainer is important, especially at the beginning, and when there are changes in the job...when there is a conflict the companies ask for us to be present....It is important that the company knows we are always available if we consider it necessary" (Psychologist, Service 8)

"...The fact that we are committed to monitoring and providing support...that there will be somebody there during the whole training period, they won't have to be there to integrate workers... That's important". (Job Trainer, Service 2)

"We guarantee the company that we intervene whenever there may be a conflict, for good or for bad...or because they make improvements or changes or....We find out from the person, or from the company, or from both. Then, maintaining this link also works because it means that when one of our users changes, because they have found something better and they have a vacancy, they bear us in mind". (Manager, Service 10)

An essential component of integration services is the need to be able to provide response to the real demands for support by the company and by the worker, a response that at the moment is conditioned by resources and the availability of the services.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to favour the improvement of the integration of people with disabilities, the results of the study enable us to suggest different actions aimed at those involved in the aforesaid processes.

The family

- To consider the family as an agent of health and not the disabled person as the focus of attention.

- To constantly provide families with information on the development of work integration processes, as well as on the possibilities and limits of people with disabilities.
- To set up joint cooperation channels between the family and the service that is carrying out the integration to guarantee the necessary support to families and facilitate coherence of the social and educational actions that are designed and implemented with people with disabilities.

Training

- To facilitate training in skills related to autonomy, decision taking and acceptance of instructions, responsibility, correct self-esteem, empathy in social relations, the ability to adapt to the surroundings and possible changes in it, etc., in the period of compulsory schooling, especially during secondary education, since these are necessary skills to hold down a job.
- To work on contents related to knowledge of the world of work, relationships and communications, participation in the community, problem solving related to the performance of work roles and multifaceted work skills, in the training programmes during compulsory secondary education.
- To foster the inclusion of a period of practical work experience prior to work integration as a way of favouring 'in situ' training of the skills directly related to the performance of the work role.

The work setting

To guarantee the continuity of work integration experiences of people with disabilities, it is necessary for Supported Employment to be recognized as services integrated in the network of social services, promoting coordination among the entities that work in the field of supported employment and those which work with people with disabilities in sheltered employment.

Work accompaniment or monitoring on the worker at the workplace

- The accompaniment of the job trainer in the context of the ordinary company as a basic factor contributing to the success of the integration process. The pace and intensity of the accompaniment must not be conditioned by the worker's disability type but by the needs and demands of the job and the person.

There are also other needs of a general nature that need to be taken into account when promoting independence and integration. In this way, it is seen that work integration is only one aspect of social integration; therefore, we need *to offer a response to the needs of community participation of people with disabilities, beyond their participation in the world of work*. Along these lines, it is vital to create awareness amongst the general public - not just the work agents - of the work possibilities and of the full participation of people with disabilities.

Referring specifically to the area of research into this matter, the carrying out of collaborative research between work groups of the university sector and professionals who participate in innovative actions of work integration of people with disabilities appears as an urgent fact. Only in this way will we be able to directly influence matters

related to the practical needs of the intervention in these contexts and facilitate at the same time the dissemination of these actions.

Finally, the study carried out confirmed the fundamental idea: it is essential to involve *all* people with disabilities in the decisions that affect their lives, from their active participation in the management of centres or services to their implication in research processes. Too often, it is assumed that people with disabilities do not have the ability to state or act upon decisions about their lives. The results of survey and previous research regarding the area of the social and work integration of these people firmly deny this stance, there is a need to give real opportunities so persons with disabilities may actively participate their life itinerary.

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